

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 19th MAY

DO YOUR BIT TO GET CAMBRIDGESHIRE CONNECTED

A major campaign was launched on Tuesday May 8, to urge residents and businesses to do their bit to help secure superfast broadband for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Superfast broadband will help boost local businesses and the economy, reduce isolation in rural communities and help improve health and access to services. Councils from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as well as the Government are investing millions of pounds in the Connecting Cambridgeshire project. But to secure vital support from broadband providers Cambridgeshire and Peterborough needs residents and businesses to simply click and show them we want improved broadband. The more people that register the fact they want superfast broadband the more chance of it being delivered.

From now people can click on the link on the new www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk website to show their support. Householders and businesses can register their demand for broadband in minutes with just a postcode and landline phone number. People who do not have access to the internet can register online or on paper forms in libraries, council offices and other public places. Visitors to the Connecting Cambridgeshire website can also check their broadband speeds, find out about the benefits of broadband for businesses and communities and volunteer to become Digital Champions for their local areas.

The aim is to bring access to superfast broadband to at least 90% of businesses and homes across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and better connectivity for all remaining premises by 2015. Cambridgeshire County Council has committed up to £20million and Peterborough City Council has pledged up to £3million towards the project, with £6.75million allocated by the Government agency BDUK. This public money is being used to attract significant investment from the private sector.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "Registering takes seconds but could make a big difference to people's lives. It means elderly residents get better access to healthcare and services. It means local businesses can grow and new ones start up, which creates more jobs and a prosperous economy. It also means children have better access to educational material, raising academic achievement.

"A simple click of the mouse could mean so much to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Showing the levels of demand for better broadband will help Connecting Cambridgeshire to attract substantial investment from broadband suppliers, particularly in hard to reach rural areas. We would encourage you to click onto www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk and register. We all have a vital role to play in supporting the campaign and I encourage residents to visit the city council's website where signing up to support superfast broadband takes just a few minutes. The more registrations we can achieve, the better chance we have of broadband suppliers coming onboard to make our vision a reality."

PRAISE AS AWARD FOR MEMBER DEVELOPMENT IS ACHIEVED

Cambridgeshire County Council has been awarded the East of England Charter For Elected Member Development. This national award recognises councils which are committed to helping councillors build their skills to enable them to play a leading role in the work of their authority and in their communities. The Charter status, which lasts for three years, was awarded following an assessment process to ensure the Council met the core standards. This includes a commitment to developing and supporting councillors to enhance their existing skills or learn new ones in line with their changing role.

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BOOK YOUR PLACE AS ADVICE SERVICE HITS THE ROAD TO LIBRARIES

An information service which helps people stay safe, well and independent, is taking to the road to spread the word across Cambridgeshire with a series of events in Libraries. The Your Life, Your Choice service provides online information for people who need information or support to enable them to live an independent life. It also provides details of assistance for such things as social and health care and aids and home adaptations which make life easier for people in their own home.

The roadshows will visit the library in Cambourne and Cambridge Central Library from mid May, and will feature:

- * Leaflets and information about staying independent, safe and well
- * Information on aids and devices to help people remain independent
- * Trading Standards advice on how to Buy With Confidence and avoid rogue traders
- * Demonstrations of The Your Life, Your Choice online information service
- * Opportunities to book a session with the libraries' Computer Buddies to help less experienced computer users access online information.

Local County Councillor, John Reynolds, said: "The Your Life, Your Choice website was developed with the support of service users, carers and our partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to encourage people to think more widely than just traditional care services when planning the support they need. These roadshows, in addition to promoting Your Life, Your Choice, are focused on providing preventative and self-help information to people who may need it and telling them about the support and services available in their local community. Hopefully they will show people what is available and the difference it can make to them, their careers and families, whilst helping them to stay safe and independent for as long as possible," added Councillor Curtis.

Roadshow schedule:

May 14-June 9 Cambourne Library

June 11-July 7 Central Library (Cambridge)

July 10-August 4 Ely Library

October 29-November 24 St Neots Library

Access to the Your Life, Your Choice website together with help to find the information you are looking for is already available in your local library or you can access information and advice directly at:

www.yourlifeyourchoice.org.uk

YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE PUT THEIR TALENT ON SHOW AT EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION EVENT

More than 60 young people with disabilities were given an opportunity to showcase their talents at recent employment information event in St Ives. The Talk About Employment event was run by Pinpoint Cambs which has been commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council to support the participation of service users, parents and carers in the planning and delivery of services designed to support young people as they move between children and adult services.

The day was deemed to be a great success with 40 employers providing details of job opportunities and the County Council giving information on employment and training it offers to disabled people as a major employer in Cambridgeshire.

Local County Council, John Reynolds, said: "Many of the young people brought along their CVs and showcased their talents and abilities proving that young people with additional needs can contribute to the workforce as much as their non-disabled peers."

FOSTERING CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Events and initiatives are being planned across Cambridgeshire to support national Foster Care Fortnight, which runs from May 14 to 27. Foster Care Fortnight is a national campaign organised by the Fostering Network. Cambridgeshire County Council will be supporting the campaign this year by organising a number of awareness raising events and activities across the county. In Cambridgeshire there are currently 184 fostering households providing 26 placements, but the county needs a further 55 to help meet the needs of the children and young people in its care.

Cambridgeshire's foster carers look after children who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to live with their birth families. These reasons can range from a family member's short-term illness to a parent's mental health problems or drug and alcohol abuse. Many children have been neglected or suffered another form of abuse. Carers provide children with a stable, supportive and loving home and are responsible for their day-to-day care. They may also have to help children come to terms with difficult or traumatic experiences. Experienced social workers are available to offer support and training to all carers.

As part of Foster Care Fortnight, promotional stands will be visiting Morrisons supermarket in Cambourne on May 19 and Asda in Cambridge's Beehive Centre on 24 May. Staff will also be available to talk to potential foster carers at Cambridge Central Library on 26 May.

Anyone who would like more information about becoming a foster carer can contact Cambridgeshire County Council's Fostering and Adoption service on 0800 052 0078 or log onto the parenting pages of Cambridgeshire County Council's website at: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/parenting

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said; "We hope Foster Care Fortnight will encourage more people in Cambridgeshire to consider becoming foster carers and help make a real difference to the lives of local children and young people. We are also delighted to be launching Cambridgeshire County Council's Foster Friendly policy, which recognises the level of commitment involved in being a foster carer, and offers increased support to our County Council employees who foster."

PARK & RIDE DURING ADULT LEARNER'S WEEK

Cambridgeshire County Council and Stagecoach will be re-launching its 'Park and Read' service during Adult Learner's Week in partnership with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

Residents found out more about 'Park and Read' at the launch event on Saturday 12 May. Two local authors will be there, Rosy Thornton and Mary Nichols, as well as staff from Cambridgeshire Libraries who were able to answer questions and provide information about the service.

The Park & Read project was first launched in 2006 and aimed to make available books for customers to read on their journeys in and out of Cambridge. There are still collections of books at four of the five Park & Ride sites where anyone can pick up something to read and return it when they've finished.

During Adult Learner's Week a new location will be launched at the Guided Bus site in Longstanton and NIACE are donating a new collection of books from the Quick Reads series at all of the sites.

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COUNCIL GETS GOOD REPORT ON YOUTH OFFENDING WORK

Work in Cambridgeshire to reduce offending and help safeguard youngsters is above the national average a new comprehensive report has found. An inspection of youth offending work in Cambridgeshire has been released today and praises the County Council as well as advising on areas of improvement.

The inspection made by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation focuses exclusively on the work undertaken by Youth Offending Teams with children and young people who have already committed an offence. The report says in summary: "Overall, we consider this a creditable set of findings. We found an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed group of staff who were keen to deliver a high quality service and who understood the needs of the children and young people with whom they worked."

"Partnership work was effective and staff from a number of agencies were able to provide support to individuals and to their families. We are confident that if the recommendations in this report are implemented the improvement required can be achieved and sustained. The report also found that the Safeguarding and Public Protection aspects of the work as well as reducing risk of harm and reoffending were all above the national average. Inspectors spoke to partners and examined case studies as well as surveying victims of crime as well as youngsters using the service".

Local County Councillor, John Reynolds, said: "We are pleased with the report which puts us above the national average. The most heartening feedback was from the youngsters themselves explaining how the work we and partners had carried out with them was reducing re-offending. Changing these youngsters lives for the better and turning them from a path that could lead to further criminality not only helps them but the community as well. One of the positives of these reports is that it helps highlight areas where we can further improve and we are taking steps to address these."

NEW MUSICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

New musical opportunities for children and young people will be created following the announcement that a new music education hub will be formed in Cambridgeshire. The Council has been asked to develop the new hub with partners - ranging from individual musicians, local ensembles and national organisations. This will enable teachers and musicians to draw on a wide range of expertise and ideas to design, facilitate and support musical opportunities for young people, both in and out of school.

Over the next three months the new hub, which will be called the Cambridgeshire Music Partnership, will develop programmes and grant funding opportunities as well as developing strategies to support singing, music-making, training, resources and access.

Local Councillor John Reynolds, said: "This is excellent news for young musicians in Cambridgeshire. Building on the work of the county music service, Cambridgeshire Music, the new music education partnership will have new opportunities to support our schools in their music development, for example through large group opportunities to try a musical instrument and helping develop the skills of music leaders to support singing and instrumental groups. Over time this will help to ensure that all children across the county have an opportunity to develop their musical skills."

"Combining the knowledge and skills of a wide range of partners will allow us to organise music education more efficiently and to offer larger scale music projects. Children and young people will have access to outstanding music making experiences."

Visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>

BORROWING MONEY FROM ILLEGAL MONEY LENDERS

If you are having financial difficulties or wish to borrow money quickly, it may be tempting to borrow money from illegal money lenders, known as 'loan sharks', who lend cash without asking questions about your financial situation. Trading Standards urge you to avoid such lenders and assure you that there are safe, reliable lenders that you can use.

Loan sharks may call at your door or you might hear about them from other people. At first they seem friendly and helpful and it might seem like a quick and easy way to borrow money. The trouble is that these people usually charge huge interest on their loan, meaning you have to pay back much more than you borrowed and far more than you can afford. With no paperwork to record what you are expected to repay, a loan of a few hundred pounds can soon lead to a demand to repay thousands of pounds - and the debt can quickly become too much to ever repay. If you struggle to keep up the repayments, loan sharks may use intimidation, threats and even violence to ensure you find the money somehow. It is believed that around 310,000 households in the UK currently owe money to loan sharks.

Luckily there are safe places you can borrow money from, even if you have financial difficulties. These lenders stick to the law, make it clear from the start the total amount you will need to repay and collect your repayments in a lawful way. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can advise you which lenders are most suitable for you. You can find your nearest Bureau by visiting www.citizensadvice.org.uk or by calling 08444 111 444.

The England Illegal Money Lending Team was set up because of the misery and fear that loan sharks cause. Cambridgeshire County Council are working with this team and local District Councils, to tackle loan sharks in the county, raise awareness of them and to support their victims.

If you know of any loan sharks operating in the area, the England Illegal Money Lending Team wants to hear from you. Call 0300 555 2222, text 'loan shark + a message' to 60003 or email reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk. Lines are open 24/7 and your details will be kept confidential.

If you already owe money to a loan shark the Illegal Money Lending team can offer advice and support. So don't suffer in silence, contact the team using the details above.

IMPROVEMENTS TO COTTENHAM TO HISTON CYCLEWAY COMPLETE

Improvements to Cottenham to Histon cycleway have now been completed at a cost of £450,000 funded through the Housing Growth Fund. The work included purchasing extra land to allow the cycleway to be widened and piping a watercourse. Local cyclists have also complimented been impressed the smooth asphalt surface and solar powered cats eyes which light the way at night and the route is already attracting extra commuter to cyclists helping to reduce traffic congestion in Cambridge.

To mark the official opening of the route a free Cyclists' Breakfast, sponsored by Station Cycles, was held on Cottenham Village Green on, May 8th.

Councillor Martin Curtis, the County Council's Cycling Champion, said: "This new improved, safer route provides an excellent, high quality cycle link, which will encourage more people to get pedalling. Cycling represents an affordable and enjoyable way to keep active whilst contributing to reduced traffic congestion in and around Cambridge."

Visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk <<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>

BUY WITH CONFIDENCE APPROVED TRADER SCHEME FROM TRADING STANDARDS

Cambridgeshire Trading Standards have introduced a new approved trader scheme, 'Buy with Confidence'. The scheme is designed to provide Cambridgeshire residents with a choice of traders, all of which have demonstrated a commitment to providing a high quality service and have been thoroughly checked by Trading Standards. To expand our list of current members we are currently undertaking a recruitment drive. If you are, or know of, a reliable trader in Cambridgeshire we want to hear from you!

How does a business join the scheme.

You can access further information and application forms at www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk. Alternatively you can ring Cambridgeshire Direct on 0345 0455206 to be sent an information pack.

Nominating a trader to join the scheme

If you know a trader that you would recommend, you can nominate them by emailing bwc@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or by calling Cambridgeshire Direct on 0345 0455206. We will do the rest.

How to use the scheme

There are a number of ways you can find traders on the scheme:

- Visit www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk.
- Telephone the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 08454 040506.
- Visit your local library where staff can look up traders for you.

Our checking procedure ensures the quality of our members but does not provide a price guarantee. We recommend that you still get three quotes to ensure you are happy with the price.

To find out more about the scheme, visit www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk or contact Cambridgeshire Direct.

ADDITIONAL CYCLE PARKING SPACES TO BE INTRODUCED AT CAMBRIDGE STATION

Cambridgeshire County Council is providing a further 200 cycle parking spaces at Cambridge Station to increase provision ahead of the proposed 3,000 space cycle park to be provided as part of the CB1 development. The Council and developers will be looking for comment on number of different designs and makes of the double height racks to see which is the best option for use in Cambridge.

The scheme will see the use of two tier/double height racks for the first time in Cambridgeshire. Such racks make better use of the available space, and allow more cycles to be neatly parked. Additional conventional single tier racks will also be put in place near to the new bus stop area, to allow cyclists approaching the station from the south to find a convenient parking space. Cambridgeshire County Council has welcomed a contribution of up to £500,000 from rail operator Greater Anglia towards the new 3,000 space cycle hub at Cambridge Station, which is estimated to cost several millions of pounds.

Councillor Martin Curtis, the County Council's Cycling Champion, said: "The County Council has been instrumental in bringing forward the new facility, and has been working closely with developer Brookgate, Cambridge City Council, the rail operator and the Cambridge Cycling Campaign, to ensure that a good quality facility is provided that reflects the needs of users."

BRINGING HISTORY ALIVE

Local residents wanting to trace their family history are invited to attend a free taster session at Cambridgeshire County Council's Central Library on Saturday 26 May.

Cambridgeshire Libraries has teamed up with Family History Detectives to promote family history by providing free access to pc's and library online resources including www.ancestry.co.uk

The taster session will take place between 2 - 3.30pm, spaces are limited to 20 people, first come first served, to book or for further information contact Paul Wilkins 07542764703, pwilkins@familyhistorydetectives.co.uk

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said "We're delighted to be hosting this event and encourage anyone interested in tracing their ancestors to come along; your history really is closer than you think.

"This is just one of a number of events that are organised by Cambridgeshire Libraries, they really are about more than just books. Keep up to date with latest events on www.cambridgeshire.net or register to receive our libraries enewsletter."

A six week course is planned to start at the library starting after the taster session for those interested, cost of which will be £50 per person*.

The topics covered will include:

- * how to start
- * civil registration
- * census returns
- * parish registers
- * wills and probate

MORE PUPILS OFFERED PRIMARY SCHOOL OF THEIR CHOICE

The vast majority of children in Cambridgeshire will be starting Reception in September in their first choice primary school, according to new figures. A total of 91.57% of children applying for a place in Reception this September by the deadline have been allocated a place at their first choice school. This is an increase on last year's 90.6%. A further 6.06% have been offered a place at their second or third choice primary school, while fewer than 2.5% could not be offered any of their preferences.

This increase has been achieved by Cambridgeshire County Council's Admissions Team, despite the continuing pressure on primary school places throughout the county. These latest figures come after it was revealed that 94.7% of students had been offered a place at their first choice secondary school in September; a rise of 5.3% on the previous year. A further 3.45% were offered a place at their second or third choice, while just 1.85% could not be offered any of their preferences. A total of 6704 children requested places at Cambridgeshire primary schools this year, with 5715 applying for secondary school. The number of applications made online also increased.

Cllr David Harty, Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Learning said: "We are delighted that we have been able to meet so many first choice preferences this year. This is down to the hard work of the admissions team and the co-operation of schools working in conjunction with officers from the school planning team, who have been instrumental in securing extra places."

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CALL FOR SOCIAL CARE REFORM

There is a clear and urgent need for the reform of the funding arrangements for social care. Nationally and locally, adult social care systems are under enormous pressure from demographic change. There is a general consensus that the need for reform has been clear for the last decade. The current government now has to address both the major economic problems it inherited and create a sustainable adult social care system. Although this is now much more difficult, I do urge the Government to grasp this issue and reform the funding arrangements for adult social care.

The recommendations of the Dilnot Commission have much to recommend them and I personally think that the idea of a cap of £35,000 on contributions to social care is a good one. However, this would have to be implemented as a part of the wider reform of funding arrangements, for which there is a pressing need.

ACTION ON LOCAL FLOODING.

With the very wet period we have recently experienced, residents will have been thinking about the prospects of some homes in low lying areas being flooded, as has happened in previous periods of very heavy rain.

In 2007 Sir Michael Pitt produced a report for Government on how much better prepared all local Authorities can be to prevent flooding. The recommendations of the report were accepted and recently became law. They placed on the County Council a lead role to tackle local sources for flood risk, with partners i.e. the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, District Councils, Land owners and Inland Drainage Boards, but no funding was provided.

The County Council with partners have agreed a local strategy and action plan. Areas at risk have been identified, plans agreed and funding sought. Areas at risk include in the Cambridge area:- Cherry Hinton, Kings Hedges, Arbury, North Chesterton, Histon & Impington, Girton,

Additionally if local flooding to property is likely to occur the council can and have taken direct emergency measures to prevent flooding. This recently occurred when 10 properties were at risk of immediate flooding. The County Council organised equipment to reduce the water flow and unblock the offending drain.

More detailed information can be found on the County Council website

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